

VZCZCXRO9294
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK
DE RUEHKB #0904/01 2671119
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 231119Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0040
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0774
RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI 1749
RUEHYE/AMEMBASSY YEREVAN 1496
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0313
RHMFISS/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BAKU 000904

NOFORN
SIPDIS

INR FOR BILL SAMII

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/24/2028
TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PINR](#) [AJ](#) [AM](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: UNODC REPORTS MAJOR UPSURGE IN HEROIN FROM IRAN,
SUGGESTS SIGNIFICANT IRANIAN DRUG PROCESSING ACTIVITY

Classified By: Joel R. Garverick for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: UNODC Baku reports that trans-shipment of heroin and other opiates from Iran through Azerbaijan has skyrocketed. Total heroin seizures by GOAJ security authorities increased from twenty kilos to over 250 kilos in 2007. These seizures accounted for less than five percent of the total volume of heroin entering Azerbaijan, and about 95 percent of this heroin enters Azerbaijan from Iran, nearly all headed for the European market. UNODC cited increasing interdiction of alternative routes through Turkish Kurdistan and alleged ethnic Azeri control of the Russian drug mafia as among the likely contributing factors to this upsurge, and asserted that trans-shipment of heroin from Iran to the Black Sea via Azerbaijani territories controlled by Armenia remains a problem.

¶2. (S) According to the UNODC officer, the large majority of heroin seized in Azerbaijan is "ready for market," with much being processed in Iranian laboratories: about 85 percent enters Azerbaijan from Iran by land, and the rest by sea routes. He described Azerbaijani and Iranian cooperation in combating this trade as "only superficial." A new regional information-sharing center based in Kazakhstan may be a bright light in the regional anti-narcotics picture, but Iran has reportedly rebuffed proposals that it join the current six-nation group (Central Asian countries plus Azerbaijan). End Summary.

Meeting with UNODC - Azerbaijan

¶3. (S) Baku Iran watcher met on September 12 Fuad Hashim-zadeh (strictly protect), the Baku-based United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) officer specializing in trans-border narcotics trafficking. The Baku UNODC office is only about 18 months old, and exists as an appendage to the regional UNODC office in Tashkent. A separate UNODC officer focuses on internal Azerbaijan narcotics issues. Hashim-zadeh said that UNODC does not have a presence in either Armenia or Georgia, and was only established in Baku after a specific request to UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa for anti-narcotics assistance from Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev.

¶4. (S) Hashim-zadeh noted that, perhaps due to Aliyev's personal interest, both he and UNODC generally enjoy a good relationship with Azerbaijan government entities, including its two primary anti-narcotics security forces, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and the Ministry of National Security

(MNS).

According to Hashim-zadeh, the latter has the effective GOAJ lead on narcotic trans-shipment and foreign narcotics activity intelligence. These opiates and heroin are not produced in Azerbaijan, unlike marijuana and hashish (which were not the focus of September 12 discussion). Hashim-zadeh offered a great deal of information on the regional and local heroin trans-shipment picture, based on his professional work, liaison with other UNODC staff and headquarters, and contacts with GOAJ security.

Major Surge in Iran-Azerbaijan Heroin Shipments

¶5. (S) According to Hashim-zadeh, in 2003 the Azerbaijani authorities seized about two kilos of heroin during the entire year. In calendar year 2006 a total of about 20 kilos was seized. In 2007 Azerbaijani authorities seized 168 kilos of heroin in one bust, the biggest in Azerbaijan's history, and recovered more than 250 kilos of heroin in 2007 overall. Based on information from Azerbaijani authorities including Ministry of National Security officers, he asserted that most or all of the seized heroin was "ready for market" (i.e., had been processed in a lab), and that about 95 percent of it entered Azerbaijan from Iran.

Hashim-zadeh said that while official government sources claim that these seizures accounted for most of the narcotic substances entering the country, MNS and other government sources privately estimate that the seized heroin actually represents no more than five percent

BAKU 00000904 002 OF 004

of the total volume being trans-shipped.

Possible Contributing Factors

¶6. (S) Apart from some intrinsic factors favoring this route, Hashim-zadeh cited an increased presence of Turkish security forces in Turkish Kurdistan and along the Turkish/Iraqi border. He speculated that this development has complicated some traditional narcotics trafficking routes into Europe, leading to a diversion to the trans-Azerbaijan route. He added that "it is well known that the Russian narcotics mafia is run by (ethnic) Azeris," and said that this could be a supplementary factor. He said that potential new drug trafficking developments in Iran, e.g., alleged expansion of narcotics infrastructure in Tabriz, is a possible additional factor. According to Hashim-zadeh, the vast majority of heroin entering Azerbaijan is headed for Western Europe, via either an Iran-Azerbaijan Georgia-Black Sea or an Iran-Azerbaijan Russia-Baltic route, in addition to an alleged Armenian-controlled route.

Land versus Sea Entries

¶7. Citing Azerbaijani security sources, the UNODC officer estimated that about 85 percent of the Iran-origin heroin is entering Azerbaijan via land borders. He said that approximately 15 percent is entering via the Caspian Sea, mainly via trucks or containers on commercial ferries originating in Turkmenistan (following route Afghanistan-Iran-Turkmenistan).

He added that the latter route may be becoming more attractive to drug smugglers, as he claimed that overlapping Azerbaijani security monitoring and management attention at ports is less comprehensive than that at official land crossings.

Alleged Iran-Armenian Routes

¶8. Noting that twenty percent of Azerbaijan's official border with Iran is currently occupied by Armenia (as a result of the unresolved Armenia-Azerbaijan war) and not controlled by Azerbaijani authorities, Hashim-zadeh cautioned that the above estimates do not include any heroin shipments that may be following an Iran-Occupied Territories-Armenia-Black Sea route. Hashem-Zadeh asserted that some UNODC headquarters officers, as well as Azerbaijani authorities, believe that several such routes exist, and that the volume of narcotics pursuing this route probably exceeds that entering the rest of Azerbaijan. Hashim-zadeh observed that Armenia is "starved for hard currency," and alleged that UNODC as well as Azerbaijani officials believe that senior Armenian political and government officials, including former President Tar-Petrosian, are personally profiting from this trade. (Note: Hashim-Zadeh is an ethnic Azeri, and his lurid assertions about Armenia need separate confirmation. End Note).

Limited Iranian Government Cooperation

¶9. (S) While agreeing that the UNODC's Teheran office has been relatively upbeat in its reporting about Iranian government anti-narcotics trafficking activities, Hashim-Zadeh was somewhat dismissive of this, claiming that this office is looking for renewed donor-funding and has a strong incentive to accentuate the positive. In fact, he insisted, the Iranian authorities provide virtually no useful information to UNODC, InterPol, or neighboring countries relating to narcotics entering Azerbaijan or Armenia from Iran, and virtually no information about narcotics transshipment activities inside Iran "outside

BAKU 00000904 003 OF 004

of the immediate (Iran-Afghanistan and Iran-Pakistan) border areas." In this vein, he claimed that there is only superficial anti-narcotics cooperation between Iranian and Azerbaijani authorities, with Iranian authorities blaming all narcotics trafficking on third-country nationals. Basically, he said, the Iranians stress their border seizures and (like some Azerbaijan officials) "basically claim to be getting it all."

New Information on Alleged Iranian Heroin Processing

¶10. (S) Hashim-zadeh speculated that Iran may be emerging as a major processing as well as transshipment center for Western-Europe bound heroin. He said that interrogations and other intelligence over the last six months suggest that a significant amount of raw heroin and opiates are being processed in laboratories in Tabriz, and perhaps other locations in Iran. Although acknowledging that, as far as he knows, this information is unconfirmed, he agreed to provide recent statistics on regional seizures of processed versus raw opiates that may buttress the allegation that significant processing is occurring in Iran. He opined that Azerbaijan's MNS has intelligence operatives in Tabriz, and may be able to provide more concrete data on this topic.

CARIC - A Bright Light?

¶11. (S) Hashim-zadeh called the recently-established Central Asian Regional Information Center (CARIC) a potential "bright spot" in the regional counter narcotics trafficking cooperation picture. He said that CARIC was established about six months ago in Almaty, Kazakhstan under UNODC sponsorship and with major donor support from the USG and the EU. Its staff includes experienced anti-narcotics security officials seconded by each of the central Asian countries plus Azerbaijan. He was upbeat about its progress, noting that the Russian government recently reversed its previously diffident posture toward this organization and is in the process of negotiating its entry. According to Hashim-zadeh, the Iranian government has so far rebuffed invitations to participate in the new anti-narcotics group, but has indicated that it will reconsider the issue if Russia joins.

¶12. (C) Bio note: Hashim-zadeh has Azerbaijani citizenship, but spent two years in the USA getting a Masters degree in international relations at Missouri State. He has worked for the UN since 1994 (initially with UNDP), and for UNODC since 2004. He has excellent English, is extremely articulate, and appears to have a strong grasp of his portfolio and substantial knowledge of wider local and regional issues.

INL Comment

¶13. (C) The UNODC officer's information on the flow of heroin from Iran gels with our impressions. While the Ministry of National Security has made great strides in the last year interdicting heroin shipments being trafficked from Iran, the State Customs Committee and State Border Service lag far

BAKU 00000904 004 OF 004

behind. Although the State Customs Committee has, by all accounts, exceptional drug K-9 units, they are seldom utilized for narcotics interdiction purposes. On several occasions when INL accompanied EXBS program advisor on visits to the southern border of Azerbaijan, Customs Committee officers and K-9,s seemed disinterested or unable to effectively search vehicles crossing the border.

DERSE